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THROUGH TAHOEAN MOUNTAINS

By MILTON S. RAY

WITH THREE PHOTOS BY OLUF J. HEINEMANN

ON the twenty-fourth of June, 1909, Heinemann and I returned from our trip to Washoe Lake, Nevada, an account of which has appeared in a previous CONDOR. We remained at Bijou until the morning of June 28, at which time we started on a long tramp through the high mountains that surround Lake Valley at the southern end of Lake Tahoe.

Our first objective point was Star Lake, one of the loftiest in the region, having an altitude of about 9,000 feet. Although en route we traversed a region of much

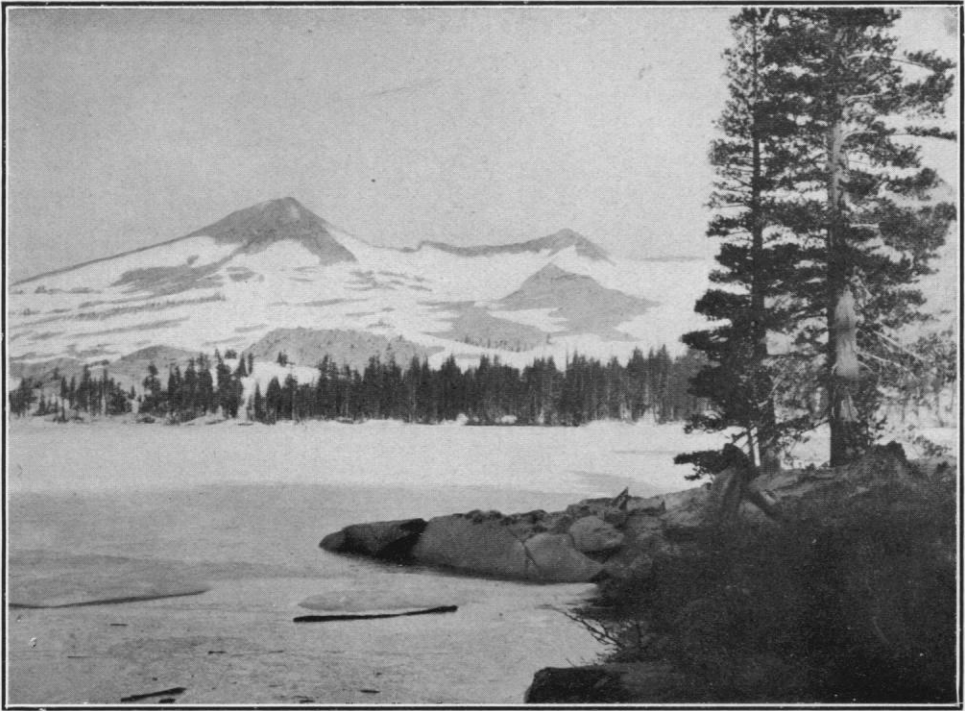


Fig. 5. ICE-COVERED LAKE-OF-THE-WOODS WITH PYRAMID PEAK IN THE BACKGROUND;
PHOTOGRAPHED JULY 1

interest to the ornithologist we failed to record anything particularly noteworthy. The only nest found on the entire day's trip was one of the Western Robin (*Planesticus migratorius propinquus*). This was on the Cold Creek Meadow, at about 7500 feet elevation, and contained four half-grown young. Returning from Star Lake, we spent the night at the Sierra House, on the edge of Lake Valley, and next morning continued on to the summit of the stage road, which we reached at half past three in the afternoon. An excursion to Lake Audrain took up the rest of the day, but failed to furnish any new material for our ornithological note-book.

The following morning (June 30) we started up the precipitous trail that leads over a lofty snow-covered range to Lake of the Woods. A few miles up the

trail Heinemann flushed a Sierra Junco (*Junco hyemalis thurberi*) from its nest, well concealed among weeds and containing two small young and an infertile egg. It was nearly dark when we reached the lake, which we found almost entirely frozen over, while most of the surrounding country was covered with snow. During the chilly night the ice-covered lake and its snowy shores, glittering in the moonlight, presented a landscape that seemed more like one in the dead of winter than on the first of July. In strange contrast to the cold nights, in these altitudes

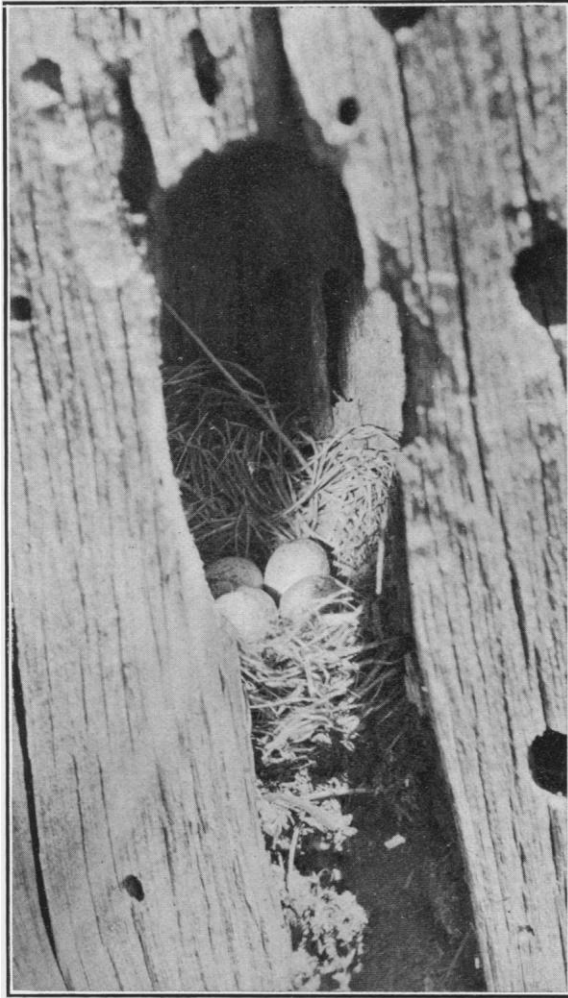


Fig. 6. AN UNUSUAL NESTING SITE OF THE SIERRA JUNCO
AT LAKE-OF-THE-WOODS

often so cold as to cause hardship to one camping out, the days were usually warm and pleasant, and at times extremely hot, which the snow by reflection increased rather than diminished. When the light of the welcome morning sun came filtering through the trees about our camp, we became aware of the presence of a pair of California Pine Grosbeaks (*Pinicola e. californica*) which were watched with that extreme interest which must ever be given to birds whose eggs remain unknown to science. The grosbeaks remained about our camp for some time, feeding on the ground and in the trees. If the birds were nesting I failed to gain any clue of it from their actions, for they flitted from branch to branch, and from tree to tree in a leisurely and unconcerned fashion, finally taking wing across the lake and disappearing in the heavy timber.

After a refreshing swim in the frigid waters of the lake we rambled along its shores for some distance. Near the water's edge where the snow had melted I found beneath an overhanging bush a well concealed nest of the Sierra Junco

with four large young. Farther on, one of the Audubon Warbler (*Dendroica auduboni*) was found eighteen feet up in a hemlock, also with four large young. The nest was made of weed stems, grasses, bark strips and rootlets, and lined with feathers. The limbs had the characteristic droop of trees in high altitudes and made the climb rather difficult. The most interesting nest found about the lake, however, was one of the Sierra Junco placed in a cavity of a fir stump three feet above the

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ground, with four eggs well advanced in incubation. Being the first we have ever found in a situation of this kind we desired very much to secure a photograph of it. In this we experienced considerable difficulty and it was only by cutting a strip of wood out from the lower edge of the hole that we succeeded in making the eggs visible on the ground glass. Inspection showed the nest to be made of light-colored grasses and weed stems, and lined with the hair of various wild animals.

After a long journey over the ridge, down through Glen Alpine Gorge, along Fallen Leaf Lake and Lake Tahoe we came into Bijou at midnight. Before we left for home on July 5 a nest of particular interest was found, one of the Pacific Nighthawk (*Chordeiles virginianus hesperis*). This was found by Mr. Charles Young, on July 3, while riding horseback along one of the lower ridges southeast of Bijou. Returning with Mr. Young I found that the two fresh eggs were simply laid on the bare, rocky soil, surrounded by pine needles, the latter, however, not having been brought by the birds. A little pine sapling close by gave the eggs some slight



Fig. 7. EGGS OF THE PACIFIC NIGHTHAWK *in situ*

shelter. The elevation was about 6350 feet. On July 4 Heinemann and I accompanied by Mr. Richard Duttke, who had just arrived, revisited the spot, and the photograph shown herewith was taken.

An interesting addition to the Lake Valley checklist was the Bullock Oriole (*Icterus bullocki*), first noted on the Bijou camp ground on June 7, and several times afterwards. This bird, or these birds, were without doubt stragglers from Carson Valley, Nevada, which lies just over the summit east of Bijou. The fact that this summit is but very little higher than Lake Valley, accounts, I believe, for the presence of the oriole, as well as the many other lower zone birds more or less abundant in Lake Valley, such as the Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura carolinensis*), House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis*), Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana occidentalis*) and Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*).